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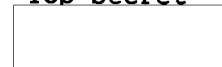
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USSR-CHINA: Call for Improved Relations

Moscow has restated its interest in better ties with China but expressed disappointment that its initiatives have not received a more positive response from Beijing. [redacted]

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An article yesterday in *Pravda* by I. Aleksandrov--a pseudonym denoting top-level endorsement--strongly reiterates President Brezhnev's call in Tashkent on 24 March for improved relations. Like Brezhnev, Aleksandrov offered no concessions on outstanding issues. Instead, he cited the Chinese calls for concrete steps by the USSR--in response to Brezhnev's speech--as evidence of "deliberate unwillingness" to normalize relations. [redacted]

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Aleksandrov warned that it is unrealistic to expect positive results when only one side makes a series of "constructive proposals" and the other side employs "pretexts" for rejecting them. Soviet Sinologists are taking a similarly cautious line in private. [redacted]

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Comment: The article makes it clear that Moscow believes the next move is up to Beijing. Its tone is conciliatory, however, and probably is meant to encourage those Chinese leaders who might want to improve ties with the USSR. In this regard, Moscow may want to counteract Vice President Bush's recent visit by again restating that Beijing has a Soviet alternative. [redacted]

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The Soviets also may want to prod the Chinese on a resumption of the border talks. Mikhail Kapitsa, the top China expert at the Soviet Foreign Ministry, reportedly is in Beijing and presumably intends to broach this subject. [redacted]

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Beijing will be disappointed with the article and will conclude from it that Moscow will not take the steps China regards as necessary to improve relations. At the same time, however, China has expanded low-level contacts with the USSR over the past few months and is likely to continue to do so. [redacted]

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[redacted]

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SYRIA-LEBANON: Political Maneuvering

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//Syria has invited a group of important Lebanese parliamentary deputies to Damascus to discuss the coming presidential election in Lebanon, which the Syrians are determined will result in the installation of a candidate favorable to Damascus.//

//Lebanese Defense Minister Skaiff told US Embassy officials in Beirut that he and his independent parliamentary bloc have been invited to meet with Syrian Foreign Minister Khaddam on Sunday. Although Skaiff said that he has reluctantly agreed to go, he has refused to bring members of his bloc. According to Skaiff, the Syrians still favor the candidacy of former President Franjiyah but indicated they would be willing to discuss other possible candidates.//

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Comment: The Syrian role in the campaign has been low key so far, but recent visits to Syria by several of its Lebanese political allies suggest that Damascus has begun pushing them to agree on a common strategy. As the vote draws nearer, the Syrians are likely to increase pressure on Lebanese deputies, particularly those who come from areas under Syrian control.

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ASEAN-US: Dispute Over Tin

//Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand agreed in Kuala Lumpur last weekend to form an Association of Tin Producing Countries if the Sixth International Tin Agreement is not ratified by July. They remain unwilling to begin discussions on tin with the US without knowing in advance its specific proposals for modifying its stockpile reduction policy, which the three continue to protest. Jakarta denies that the Association will act as a cartel, even though the three countries produce over half the world's tin.//

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Comment: //Press statements to the contrary, the ASEAN tin exporters remain deeply divided on the role of the new Association in the tin market and on the proper approach to the US over the sale of its surplus tin. Kuala Lumpur is insisting that the Association move ahead even if the International Tin Agreement is ratified. Bangkok and Jakarta, however, are unlikely to have any interest in the Association if the agreement comes into force this summer. Jakarta is organizing a new diplomatic campaign to obtain ratification among consumer countries.//

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